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ABSTRACT

Changes and development in Chinese television (CCTV) over the past 28 years have had profound effects on Chinese society. National News, which has the biggest television audience, has enabled the populace to know what is happening in China. Educational programming is given high priority through special telecourses presented for society in general, and through Television University and Television Secondary Schools, which act as supplementary institutions of regular education. Children's programs have constituted a considerable percentage of CCTV's overall programming since its early years. Targeted at preschool and school age children, these programs are varied in subject and lively and interesting in style and form. Sports programs are attracting ever-increasing numbers of viewers and providing impetus to the development of popular sports. A wide range of service programs help people with problems of daily living, while entertainment brings the performing arts to the viewing audience. Television influences viewers both directly and indirectly in the formation of standards of values and moral and cultural development. However, there is still room to improve the range of programs and transmission times to provide viewers with a truly public service. (CGD)

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TELEVISION AND ITS SOCIAL EFFECTS IN CHINA

by

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China Central Television

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TELEVISION AND ITS SOCIAL EFFECTS IN CHINA

Ma Chaozeng

Television in China came into existence in the late 1950s. The first television station in the People's Republic was established on May 1st, 1958. It was known as Beijing Television. It changed its name to China Central Television, or CCTV, on May 1st, 1978. CCTV in its early years was only a small TV station, with a transmission power of 1,000 watts covering only the Beijing area. It then broadcast only four times a week, each time for two to three hours. During the past 28 years since its establishment, Chinese television has experienced tremendous changes and development. The number of TV stations in the country increased from 29 in 1980 to 204 in 1985, and the number of relay stations from about 400 to 11,000 in the same period. At present, the national micro-wave system links into a whole network all the major cities in 27 provinces and autonomous regions, excluding only Tibet, Xinjiang and Taiwan. With some 10,000 additional micro-wave lines constructed with regional funding, CCTV is now able to cover the most part of China's territory of 9.6 million square kilometers.

With the launching in April 1984 of an experimental communications satellite, the two capital cities of Tibet and Xinjiang were also able to receive CCTV's daily transmissions. Now the national television transmission network covers about 60 per cent of the country's population. The percentage will soon further increase with the recent launching of yet another communications satellite.

At present, CCTV has three full color channels. Most provincial, regional and municipal stations operate two channels. Programming, whether on CCTV or local stations, mainly consists of news, education, and entertainment. In general, programming on Chinese television is getting more varied and colorful and on-the-air time is on the rise year by year. CCTV, for instance, broadcast an average of 27 hours daily in 1985.

Like in many other countries, television in China has also undergone a three stage development from valve to transistor, and finally to the integrated circuit. And similar to many advanced

countries, we are also using advanced technologies and equipment in television. According to available statistics, there were about 50 million television sets throughout the country at the end of 1985. It is estimated that about 200 million of China's one billion population have access to television.

News on television is one of the most popular programs both in cities and the countryside. The daily CCTV National News broadcast has long established its popularity and authenticity. It is regularly received and retransmitted by almost all local TV stations of the country, boasting about 200 million viewers.

A survey shows that the National News has the biggest audience of all its programs. It goes on the air at 7:00 p.m., Beijing time. It has become a major channel through which the average Chinese gets his domestic and international news. Many viewers have commented in their letters that television has enabled them to know what is happening in China and the world without getting out of the door of their house, chat watching CCTV news not only enables them to understand better the situation both at home and abroad, but also helps them gain knowledge and information, and that watching CCTV news has become an indispensable part of their daily life. Quite a few high schools, such as the Minyuan Fuzhong High School in Beijing, have made it a rule for their students to watch the daily CCTV news broadcast at school or at home as a supplementary source for their current affairs classes. Li Wei of Minyuan Fuzhong said in his letter:"We watch CCTV news every evening. We usually take down notes when there are major news events." What is worth mentioning is that news on television is also attracting an ever-increasing number of viewers in the Chinese countryside. A typical letter received recently says:"We young peasant farmers here like all the programs you present, but we find your news most interesting and enjoyable." Likewise, CCTV news is also very popular among Chinese factory workers. There is a small factory with 150 workers in Shandong Province. After finding the growing interest of the workers in television, the factory trade union bought a 20-inch color TV for the workers to watch in their spare time. They even appointed

a caretaker. In his letter to CCTV, the caretaker said:" Workers here show great interest in CCTV's National News, particularly in international news."

CCTV news also reports criticisms and complaints from members of the public. One such example was the coverage in eight installments of Beijing commuters' difficulties in using the public transportation system in August 1984. It caused an enthusiastic response from the viewers not only in Beijing, but also from other parts of the country.Song Quanbao of Beijing Machinery Casting Plant said in his letter:"I keep an eye on the screen even while I am cooking in the kitchen these days for fear that I'll miss the day's report. CCTV has voiced just what we want to say. You have done a terrific thing." The report also drew the attention of the Beijing municipal government, which after the news report, promptly took measures to solve the problems revealed on CCTV.

Educational programming is given high priority in China. It has constituted a significant part of CCTV's overall programming from the day the station began transmission in the late 1950s. Programs include lessons on moral values, popular science, TV lectures, children's programs, sports programs and other service programs. Through these, people can acquire both instruction as well as pleasure.

In our educational programs, we do not only introduce the exemplary deeds of celebrities, but also portray ordinary people and their moments of hardship and happiness.By reflecting the thoughts and ideals of these people, we hope to encourage society at large to forge ahead. The program In His Spare Time displays the sparetime activities and the family life of Song Dongsheng, a lecturer from the Transportation Cadres' Training Institute, and shows the steadfastness and dedication of today's middle-aged intellectuals. The program The Sculptor Liu Huanzhang similarly portrays the attitude of Liu Huanzhang, a teacher of the Central Arts and Crafts College, towards his life and career. Through such programs, it is hoped that the younger generation in particular will be encouraged to set high ideals for themselves, to take a more mature view of life and to develop a sense of responsibility towards society and towards the country.

Introducing China's varied natural scenery, modern constructions and different ethnic minorities are also an important part of our social ecucational programs. Through such programs as Across the Motherland, viewers can learn about the country's history, geography and culture,and thus broaden their vision on the one hand and deepen their understanding of their own civilization on the other.

In August 1983, we began broadcasting a 25-episode TV series entitled The Yangtze River, a joint-venture project between CCTV and the Japanese Sada Planning INS. The program served as a detailed illustrative guidebook to the relics, history, geography, scenery and people of both banks of China's longest river. The narration was a well-balanced combination of factual information and literary allusions and thus, together with the highly artistic filming of the program, drew millions of viewers, making it one of the most highly rated programs of the year.

China's earliest educational television, the Beijing Television University, was co-sponsored by the Beijing Educational Bureau and CCTV. It was actually a sparetime university for workers and government employees to study systematically different disciplines within the liberal arts and natural sciences.

Since 1977, China has embarked upon the road to modernization. China's ambitious modernization program entails professional knowledge and expertise and the people who master them as well as a general enhancement of the population's cultural level. However, as a developing country, China does not have a high level of science and technology due to its large population and territory and lack of educational facilities and personnel. It was under these circumstances that education through television came into being and has been developing rapidly in recent years.

Educational television in China takes two forms: special telecourses and a television university.

The Central Radio and Television University was set up in 1979 by the Central Broadcasting Administration (predecessor of the present Ministry of Radio, Film and Television) and the Ministry of Education (now the Education Commission). It is a comprehensive university of a regular nature directly under the jurisdiction

of the Education Commission. CCTV is in charge of taping and transmitting the various courses. There are six hours of lectures, three in the morning and three in the afternoon, telecast throughout the country. TV University uses the same textbooks as regular universities and colleges, and its students come from all walks of life. They study for a complete course of three academic years before getting their diplomas, all the while receiving their normal salaries. In 1982, the total number of graduates from Television University's seven disciplines was 78,031. The total enrollment at the end of 1985 was 673,600. In addition, some provinces and cities have opened television high schools and technical schools of their own, which have enabled many young people out of school to get a regular secondary education at home. The television technical schools help train special personnel and technical workers needed in various fields. In short, Television University and television secondary schools act as supplementary institutions of regular education.

Special telecourses on CCTV are presented mainly for society in general. CCTV resumed its telecourse broadcasts in 1977 after a temporary suspension in the 1960s. Courses offered then included basic mathematics for high school students, theory of electricity and English, which aroused tremendous interest among young people. Within days after the broadcast, CCTV received thousands of letters from all over the country, expressing appreciation for providing such excellent educational opportunities. Textbooks of these courses all of a sudden became bestsellers in short supply. At Beijing's Wangfujing Xinhua Bookstore alone, shoppers had to line up for two and a half kilometers on the first day of CCTV's telecourse broadcast. Today it is quite common to hear a lecturer's voice echoing around an apartment building. CCTV's telecourse programs have undergone remarkable development in the past seven years. CCTV has produced a number of popular foreign language telecourse programs such as Mary in Beijing, a series for teaching children English, English on Sunday, Japanese on Sunday and Introduction to French. Of these, English has proved to be the most popular, as it meets an urgent need in international communications between China and other countries. At present, CCTV telecourse programming consists of 14 regular programs which are broadcast 30 times a

week, for a total of 810 minutes. Understanding Machine Drawings, a 1982 CCTV production, for instance, enabled some two million young workers to understand and use machine drawings. We learned of a story about a farmer-turned-factory manager. Wang Lin was once a farmer in a small village. When he was employed by a township factory two years ago, he found all he learned from his elementary school education could barely meet the requirements of his job. "I didn't know how to read a machine drawing," he said, "But to my surprise, a television lecture had been on about machine drawings. I persisted in watching the lectures for a period of three months before I became the factory manager." His factory recently developed a new type of electronic scale. Wang Lin took part in the new product's designing. Another telecourse on CCTV concerns agricultural science, which is particularly popular in the countryside. Since the responsibility system was introduced in the countryside a few years ago, there has been an ever-growing demand for knowledge and expertise among Chinese farmers who, by improving crop yields, can then increase their own income. Xu Lushan, a farmer engaged in tree planting, wrote us:"I want to express my thanks for your telecourse on growing hawthorns. Knowledge and information are indispensable nowadays whether in raising pigs and poultry, in growing crops, or in tending fruit trees."

CCTV has in recent years presented quite a number of top quality educational programs, which are both informational in content and attractive in style. Among them, two deserve special mention: Follow Me and Chinese Romanization. An English teaching program, Follow Me is a series of 60 half-hour episodes. It was adapted from a BBC English teaching series of the same title. It touched off an enthusiastic response from the public when the first episode was aired. The Chinese version of Follow Me is a revolution compared with other Chinese educational programs. It has done away with the conventional classroom, blackboard, and forced-feeding method of teaching. It has won acclaim from people of all circles. Even to date, it retains undiminished popularity despite repeated telecasts in the past several years. All six million copies of the textbook of Follow Me were sold out throughout the country. A viewer watching this program said in his letter: "English is no longer mere dull and dry symbols to me. Learning

can be a pleasant and interesting experience."

Chinese Romanization was one of CCTV's early exploratory educational programs with more emphasis on visual presentation. It is targeted for pre-school children. It systematically teaches young children how to spell and pronounce Chinese words in romanized alphabetic letters with simple drawing, subtitling, animation and superimposition techniques. It is taught usually by telling an interesting story. The series is made up of 48 10-minute segments. It has been highly praised by adults as well as young viewers. Like Follow Me, the series has also been rebroadcast a number of times and there are still requests for repeats. The series has not only sped up the popularization of the Chinese phonetic spelling system, but also promoted the nation-wide drive to speak standard Chinese. Chinese Romanization won a Special Prize at the 14th Japan Prize International Educational Radio and Television Competition in October 1983.

Children are the future of mankind. Children's programs have constituted a considerable percentage in CCTV's overall programming ever since its early years. A special department in charge of the production of children's programs was set up in CCTV in 1983.

CCTV's children's programs include two categories. The first is devoted to schoolchildren aged between seven and thirteen. The second category is targeted for pre-school children ranging from three to six. Children's programs must needs be varied in subject and lively and interesting in style and form. Chinese television stations at various levels have made exploratory endeavors to meet these requirements.

One example worth mentioning was the first National Children's Drawing Competition organized by CCTV in 1978. The youngest of the participants was three years old. The number of works presented amounted to 16,000. The majority of these were related with the children's daily lives while the rest were landscape paintings.

The Beijing High School Students' Quiz Contest held on CCTV in the summer of 1981 was also a success. A viewer from Anhui Province wrote in his letter: "The 28 households in our courtyard have all been watching the quiz shows over the past few weeks. Many of

us, old and young, often have a heated argument about the answers. Some take out their books, dictionaries and newspapers to prove they're right. Your program has started a general knowledge fever in this courtyard." Watching the quiz contest were also many scientists and educators. Mao Yisheng, China's noted bridge expert, commented after watching the shows: "I watched it too. It was educative not only to children, but also to adults like myself."

Other quiz contests held on CCTV have included a History and Geography Contest, a Chinese Literature Contest among 16 high schools, and the Hope Cup Quiz Contest for elementary school children. These televised quiz programs are aimed at fostering young people's creative power and their ability to tackle practical problems. Between Heaven and Earth, an informational children's serial show, was first broadcast on CCTV in 1984. Each show lasting 15 minutes deals with two subjects, one always in the form of a demonstration by a skilled craftsmanship teacher, teaching how to make little toys out of simple material. CCTV has received over a thousand letters from young viewers expressing their appreciation of the shows. One letter written by Chen Xueqin and Chen Xiaomei from Guizhou province says: "It was with great interest that we watched every of your Between Heaven and Earth shows. It was both educational and entertaining. Now we can make beautiful toys with our own hands. It's great fun." Many viewers of the shows even sent their self-made toys to the Children's Department as a way of expressing their appreciation of the shows.

Sports program on CCTV dates back more than 20 years. With the development of sports in China, CCTV Sports attracts an ever-increasing number of viewers throughout the country. The telecasting of major domestic and world sports events has also given impetus to the development of popular sports in this country.

In November 1981, CCTV telecast live highlights of the World Cup volleyball championships including the Chinese Women's team's winning matches with Japan, the United States, the Soviet Union and Cuba. The televised matches were watched by hundreds of millions of Chinese throughout the country, old and young, at homes, schools, factories and even in the offices. During this period, CCTV received telegrams, letters and phone calls from over 4,000 viewers, all extending thanks for televising these matches.

During the 23rd Olympic Games, television played an even more significant role in providing sports lovers with timely information of the Games' daily results. Wellknown brands of television sets were sold out in many cities in the country. Even the number of pedestrians on the streets would sharply drop when a major event was on TV. Viewers during that period numbered several hundred million.

In addition to live transmissions of major sports events at home or abroad, CCTV has several weekly sports programs such as Sports Review, all broadcasting a large enthusiastic audience. Partly thanks to the efforts of television, a nation-wide sports fever has been going on in China in recent years. Sportswear has become the fashion for people, old and young. Programs, like Taijichuan Boxing and Go, are not only informational, but also helpful in promoting a popular consciousness of the importance of keeping healthy and fit.

We began broadcasting service programs immediately after the establishment of our television station. By the end of the 70s and the beginning of the 80s, a wide range of service programs were produced by different TV stations throughout the country. At Your Service is without doubt the most popular one. Produced by CCTV, it features cookery, dress-making, potting plants and various tips on house-keeping. Since the beginning of 1983, the range of features has grown more extensive, and now also include keep-fit tips for the aged, how to bring up children, maintenance of electrical machines, photography, stamp collecting, and investigating into viewers' complaints about bad quality products. The program is broadcast once a week for 20 minutes and covers no less than four items on each occasion. More than 40,000 letters have been received from viewers, and the record total number of letters for any month came to more than 5,400. A viewer from Shanxi Province said in his letter: "Since 1983, At Your Service has made great changes in content and presentation. Your explanations about the history of our New Year, photography, cookery and your answers to viewers' questions are all extremely simple and clear. They are exactly the things people want to know, and your program really serves the community. At Your Service

has organized several competitions, including the popular Family Feast Competition, in which the top six recipes were chosen from a total of 1,700, and were demonstrated on television. As a result of the program's success, a book entitled A Selection of Recipes for a Banquet at Home was published and became an instant best-seller.

Entertainment also enjoys great popularity. Making up 5 per cent of CCTV's total transmission hours, it comprises music, opera, dance, acrobatics, ballad singing, stage plays, drama and movies. In offering entertainment, China's television stations pay attention not only to ensuring a high artistic standard, interest and taste, but also to preventing unhealthy social effects.

A Spring Festival Evening Party, in celebration of the Chinese Lunar New Year, has been presented on television annually in the past few years. It has been the most popular of all programs for years on CCTV. Audience ratings mounted to 50 million in the most recent Spring Festival Evening Party show. The Spring Festival is an occasion of family reunion, eating, drinking, visiting relatives and friends as well as setting off fireworks and firecrackers. But with the popularization of television sets in China, watching television has become an important activity in celebrating this traditional festival. Television has thus changed customs. Many of the songs sung at the televised celebration party often turn into popular hits throughout the country. Many of the show and performances at the party become major topics of conversation at homes, on the streets or on the buses.

On other major national holidays, such as the May 1st International Labor Day, October 1st National Day and the Mid-Autumn Festival, there are also celebration parties on television in China. Naturally, these shows always draw a much bigger audience than usual.

Television drama is a fairly new form of theatrical art in China. Although it existed soon after CCTV was established, real development has taken place only in recent years. CCTV broadcast only a little more than a dozen television dramas in 1979. But in 1985, a total of 434 television dramas were aired on CCTV, on average one television drama a day. Among the well-received drama series on CCTV are Heroes of the Water Margin, Dreams of the Red Mansion and Journey to the West, all adapted from famous classical Chinese novels of the same titles. Four Generations under One Roof is a 28-episode serial drama based on the novel by Lao She about the hard lives and oppression ordinary Chinese in Beijing endured during the Japanese

Occupation. The drama produced strong reactions among viewers ranging from housewives, farmers, factory workers to students and professors. It helped the young understand the past and the old review history. What is more important, the drama created a st ng national consciousness of the effects of war and aggression and strong national aspirations for peace and moderni tion for China. Yang Xinmin from Hangzhou said in his letter that his whole family felt they were learning history lessons at home, lessons that aroused their patriotic feelings. A six-year-old boy, Zhang Xiaobin told a CCTV reporter: "I watch Four Generations under One Roof every night together with mummy and daddy."

Foreign productions also draw a very large audience in China. British drama series, such as Madame Curie, David Copperfield, The Mayor of Casterbridge, Anna Karenina, received an enthusiastic response from the Chinese audience when they were shown on CCTV a few years ago. Viewers particularly appreciate the high artistic standard of these productions. Many programs produced from other countries have also been well received.

In compliance with the country's open policy, CCTV attaches great importance to importing foreign programs ranging from news and documentaries to dramas and movies since the Chinese audience have a keen interest in the outside world. CCTV receives on a daily basis major international news reports by satellite from Visnews and UPITN and feed them into its evening National News broadcast. International news reports provide the Chinese audience with an important channel through which they gain much of their information about what is happening in the rest of the world. Thanks to CCTV's efforts in introducing sports in other countries, Chinese viewers have been able to see for the first time boxing and rugby matches. As a matter of fact, many forms of sports such as marathon, figure skating and synchronized swimming gained popularity only after they were repeatedly shown on television. The regular weekly program, Animal Kingdom, has enabled our audience to see various rare animals and birds all over the world. The animal series is also thought to have prompted a nationwide awareness of the importance of protecting our environment. Foreign programs provide viewers with opportunities of seeing what is happening outside China.

In brief, television in China has wide-spread and profound effects on society. Thanks to its development, television ranks top among mass media forms in China. It has the largest audience and provides information the fastest way. The development of television has also exerted great influence on the country's performing arts such as the theater, the motion picture industry, etc., in a way that they now have to reorient their goals. The emergence of television in China has also changed cultural life-styles. People no longer have to line up for a ticket to see a movie or a play at the theater. They just sit back at home and see what they like on the television screen. Television is playing an increasingly greater role in people's daily lives. It provides information, education as well as entertainment. It influences both directly and indirectly its viewers in their formation of standards of values and moral and cultural development.

Chinese television has developed immensely over the past 28 years. However, the range of programs is still limited and transmission time not as extensive as our viewers would wish. CCTV's present duty is to concentrate on these two aspects of our work so that we may provide our viewers with a truly public service.